



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

In the Matter of Joe Arku, Program
Specialist 1 Social/Human Services
(S0745A), Statewide

Examination Appeal

CSC Docket No. 2020-1721

ISSUED: MAY 22, 2020 (HS)

Joe Arku appeals the determination of the Division of Agency Services (Agency Services), which found that he did not meet the experience requirement for the open-competitive examination for Program Specialist 1 Social/Human Services (S0745A), Statewide.

The subject examination was announced with a closing date of August 21, 2019 and was open to New Jersey residents who possessed a Bachelor’s degree and one year of experience in planning, monitoring, coordinating, implementing, modifying and/or evaluating a social or human services program. A Master’s degree in a Social/Human Services specialty area, Public or Business Administration, Child Advocacy and Policy, or Child Advocacy and Policy with a concentration in Public Child Welfare could be substituted for the required experience.¹

In his application materials, the appellant listed his Bachelor’s degree and Master’s degree in Social Work from Rutgers University School of Social Work. He also listed his experience as a Social Worker 1 Psychiatric with the New Jersey Department of Health from October 2017 to August 2019; Human Rights Activist/Social Justice Advocate with the Rutgers Center for the Studies of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights (CGCHR) from January 2008 to August 2019; Individual/Family Therapist with the Moving On Life Health Center from March 2014 to March 2018; Program Supervisor with the Arc of Union County

¹ This substitution clause appears in the job specifications for the Program Specialist Social/Human Services title series.

from July 2017 to October 2017; Teacher with Newark Public Schools from April 2012 to June 2017; Behavioral Therapist (Individual/Family) with the Drenk Behavioral Health Center from July 2013 to January 2014; Project Consultant with the CGCHR during March 2012; Volunteer with the Red Cross from January 2011 to February 2012; Acting Volunteer Coordinator/Social Worker with Liberation in Truth from April 2010 to September 2010; Educator/Advisor with Friends and Families United, Inc. from January 2005 to June 2010; Faculty/Technology Support Staff with Newark Public Schools from June 2005 to June 2010; Counselor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New Jersey from May 2008 to June 2010; Social Work Intern with Liberation in Truth from September 2009 to May 2010; Social Worker/Youth Counselor with St. Timothy's Group Home for Boys from May 2008 to April 2009; and Social Work Intern with the George Washington Carver School from January 2006 to September 2006. Agency Services credited the appellant with four months of applicable experience based on his experience as a Program Supervisor with the Arc of Union County from July 2017 to October 2017. However, none of the remaining listed positions were credited because they primarily focused on casework.

With respect to the substitution clause for experience, Agency Services determined that upon review of the various degrees listed in the clause, it was clear that each degree's respective required coursework has a focus on policy, procedures, programs and administration in organizations, except for the degree in a "Social/Human services specialty area." Agency Services reasoned that based on the experience requirement and review of the acceptable degrees for the substitution clause, it would consider the Social/Human services specialty area degree programs to require a curriculum that is focused on administration of organizations and their policies and procedures. It noted that in order to use a Master's degree in Social Work for substitution for the required experience, the candidate would have to possess a Master's degree in Social Work with an administrative specialization, or a general Master's degree in Social Work that includes a minimum of 15 credits focused on policy and/or administration.² According to Agency Services, the administrative specialization is more closely aligned with the focus of the other degrees named in the substitution clause, and therefore, it would consider a Master's degree in Social Work with an administrative track, or a general Master's degree in Social Work that includes a minimum of policy/administrative coursework, to be included within the Social/Human services specialty area. Agency Services also indicated that it would consider a Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology to be a sufficient substitution for the required experience. Specifically, this degree has a broad focus, concentrating less on the individual and more on the dynamic and structural issues facing organizations in the public and private sectors. The

² The 15-credit minimum was essentially drawn from the number of credits required to complete the Management and Policy Specialization within a Master's degree in Social Work at Rutgers University School of Social Work.

Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology applies psychological principles to an organization, affecting its employees, its administration and, potentially, its policies and procedures.

Based upon its interpretation of the substitution clause, Agency Services did not accept the appellant's Master's degree in Social Work as substitution for the experience requirement. In this regard, the appellant's specialization was Clinical Social Work, not Management and Policy, and he only possessed nine credits' worth of coursework in policy or administration.³

In light of the foregoing, Agency Services deemed the appellant ineligible since he lacked eight months of applicable experience.

On appeal to the Civil Service Commission (Commission), the appellant maintains, among other things, that his Master's degree in Social Work should substitute for the required experience, per the job specification for the subject title.

CONCLUSION

N.J.A.C. 4A:4-2.3(b) provides that applicants shall meet all requirements specified in the open-competitive examination announcement by the closing date.

Upon review, the Commission finds that the appellant's Master's degree in Social Work should have been accepted as substitution for the required experience. The substitution clause in the examination announcement referred to Master's degrees in a "Social/Human services specialty area." As written, the announcement did not provide adequate notice of Agency Services' interpretation of the clause and the criteria it ultimately applied to determine that the appellant's Master's degree was not acceptable. The appellant's assumption that his Master's degree in Social Work was in a "Social/Human services specialty area" was reasonable, and he should be admitted to the examination. Any similarly situated applicants who may also have been deemed ineligible previously should be admitted. If Agency Services wishes to apply its criteria, it should first ensure that those criteria are clearly incorporated into the job specifications for the Program Specialist Social/Human Services title series so that they will be reflected in future examination announcements.

ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that this appeal be granted and the appellant's application be processed. Additionally, the Division of Agency Services is ordered to

³ The following courses, totaling nine credits, were deemed applicable: Social Welfare Policy and Services II; Social Work with Immigrants and Refugees; and Advanced Direct Practice School Setting.

admit to the examination any similarly situated applicants who were also previously deemed ineligible.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON THE
20TH DAY OF MAY, 2020



Deirdre L. Webster Cobb
Chairperson
Civil Service Commission

Inquiries
and
Correspondence

Christopher S. Myers
Director
Division of Appeals and Regulatory Affairs
Written Record Appeals Unit
Civil Service Commission
P.O. Box 312
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0312

c. Joe Arku
Kelly Glenn
Records Center